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157

The great Duty of doing as you would be done by, explain'd and recommended,

IN A

SERMON

PREACH'D at the

Assizes held at *Nottingham*

Before the Honourable

Mr. Baron *COMYNS*,

AND

Mr. Justice *REEVE*,

On *July* 25. 1735.

By *JOHN FOSS*, A. M. Rector of *Castleford*, in the County of *YORK*.

Hic Murus aheneus esto. Hor.

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To the Right Worſhipful

THOMAS LISTER, *Eſq*;

High-Sheriff of the County of NOTTINGHAM;

AND

To the Right Honourable

JOHN Lord Viſcount *Gallway*,

Sir George Savile, *Bart.*
Sir Hardolph Waſteneys, *Bart.*
William Levinz *the elder*, *Eſq*;
William Levinz *the younger*, *Eſq*;
John Plumptre, *Eſq*;
George Gregory, *Eſq*;
Edward Melliſh, *Eſq*;
Richard Acklom, *Eſq*;
John Emerton, *Eſq*;
Nicholas Charlton, *Eſq*;
George Maſon, *Gent.*
Henry Donſton, *Gent.*
Abraham Colton, *Gent.*
Gilbert Berisford, *Gent.*
Samuel Wilkinſon, *Gent.*
Anthony Clarkſon, *Gent.*
Thomas Allicock, *Gent.*

Gentlemen of the Grand-Inqueſt,

THIS

SERMON

(Publiſh'd at their Requeſt)

Is humbly dedicated

By their moſt obedient Servant,

JO[illegible] FOSS

MATTH. vii. 12.

Therefore all things whatſoever ye would that men ſhould do to you, do ye even ſo to them: For this is the Law and the Prophets.

THE few Words I have read to you contain the moſt compleat as well as the moſt uſeful and inſtructive Leſſon of Morality that was ever delivered to the World. Perfection and Happineſs are rather to be met with in the Schemes and Theories, than in the Practice of Mankind. But ſo much is certain, that nothing would bid fairer for them, than the univerſal Prevalency of this Chriſtian Precept.

Which,

Which, by obliging every Man to do as he would be done by, would banish Oppression, Injustice, whatever breaks in upon the Rights and Properties of other Men, whatever carries the Appearance of an harsh and offensive, or even a disobliging Thing: And on the contrary, would throughout the whole of the Intercourse of Offices which they have with each other, introduce such a human and friendly Disposition towards all Men, as must lay the true and only lasting Foundation of that good Agreement and Harmony amongst them, which is so much wanting. And which, wherever it is, must give a truly happy Turn to Society; must make it productive of all the Advantages, which by our united Hearts and Endeavours, we are capable of procuring to each other.

I question not, but you all understand the Meaning of the Words. I shall not, under pretence of explaining them, give you any of *my own* in their Room. If I did, they would not, they could not be any plainer. However there are some Difficulties, which attend the Rule, and which must be clear'd before

before it can be made useful and practicable.

These I shall in the first Place endeavour to remove; and then proceed to lay before you some Motives to the Practice of it.

First, I am to endeavour to clear the Difficulties which attend the Rule.

These arise from the Generality of the Words, All Things whatsoever, *&c.* For if all or any of our Desires, be they what they will, are to be the Measure by which we are to be determin'd in what we are to do to others: The *Rule* so understood, will be found in some Cases to be *unjust*, and in some to be altogether impracticable. For Instance; in Judicial Proceedings, were the Cries and Importunities of the Criminal to be regarded rather than those of Justice, because those, who preside in them, in the same unhappy Circumstances, would be sure alike to petition for Impunity: Here what is unjust would be practised. So again in the other Respect; when we go to Law with any Person, we naturally desire that others would not give the Cause against us: And

on the other hand, turning the Tables, we as naturally desire, where we see just Reason for it, that we be left at Liberty to determine against *them*. Now make our Desires the Standard here, and the Rule will be *impracticable*, for we desire a *Contradiction*. Now this being so, the *Rule* cannot be supposed to intend any such Thing, to oblige us in one Case to what is *impracticable*, or in the other to what is *unjust*.

Common Sense, and the Reason of Things, naturally lead us to except such Cases as these, and we readily understand the Words before us, with these Limitations, that *we* are in all Cases to do as we would be done by, unless where the Thing is evidently *unlawful*, or in some Respect or other absurd and unreasonable. Thus, to produce a Parallel Instance; Children are commanded to obey their Parents in *all Things*; and yet who ever thought that there were no excepted Cases? Who ever imagin'd, (even if this had not been expressly declar'd in Scripture,) but that they were to obey *God* rather than *Man*: And where his Laws interfer'd, to disobey *Parents* or any others, whom

whom in the same *general* Words they might be commanded to obey.

If therefore we are in general to *do* as *we* ourselves desire to be *done by*; it is plain such of our Desires only are referr'd to, as are lawful; such as have some Foundation in Equity and *Right Reason*; such, in short, as cannot be refused without intrenching in some Respect, some Degree or other, on what the Laws of Society or Humanity require of us.

It may be ask'd here, What then is become of this so much magnify'd, this golden *Rule*? Or what is there so very extraordinary in it, since at this rate it implies nothing more than this obvious Truth, that in all our Dealings with others we are to be guided by Reason?

For if this is all the Light we receive from it, even when we have comply'd with it, still we are not to be determin'd by what we would they should do to us, but by the *Right*, the *Equity* of the Case; now of this *Reason* only can judge; Reason therefore, and not

this *Rule*, is what in such Cases must ultimately be our Guide.

I answer; that tho' it is certain that *Reason*, as the *sovereign Faculty* in us, ought ever to be our *Guide*, nor can we act up to the just Dignity of our *Nature* without finally appealing to it, both in this and in all other Matters whatever; yet it is likewise as certain, that without the Help of this *Rule* it will frequently be but of little Service to us. It is a Mistake to imagine, that Reason, without a proper Care to guard it against the undue Influence of Passion and Interest, is a sufficient Security against unjust and iniquitous Behaviour towards other Men; without some Care of this kind, where their Interests interfere and come in competition with our own, if * *Reason* acts any Part at all, it is usually a very unfair one; instead of informing us what is our Duty, it serves only to explain it away; instead of leading us into what is right, it carries us further from it; it finds out Pretences for our doing what is wrong,

* By Reason I would be understood to mean the Faculty of Reason, which may be exercis'd rightly or corruptly; and I think myself justify'd in such Use of the Word from Mr. *Lock*, *Woolaston*, and others.

wrong, Pleas to justify it when done. Who has not often observ'd that Men reason very differently in their own Case from what they do in that of other Men? If we do not see this in ourselves, we see it plainly enough in others; and every Man is apt to observe and wonder in another's Case, that he himself should not see what is so very plain: This Observation holds so generally, that a superior Understanding, whatever difference it may make in other Respects, hardly makes any at all in this; or if it does, it is only for the worse, as it renders Men but the abler in the Practice of such Partiality and Unfairness.

I observe further; a very great Part of that Branch of our Behaviour which regards other Men, cannot exactly be mark'd out, within any certain and definite Bounds. Tho' there is a fair and an unfair Part, an equitable, and an iniquitous one; (scarce any one is so hardy as to deny this in general) yet in the particular Instances they frequently run the one into the other in so imperceptible a manner, that where they either of them begin or end, it is hardly possible to say. Now because in such Cases, what is right

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or wrong cannot exactly, and just to a Point be defin'd (as distinct particular Crimes may) this gives a Latitude, which Reason under corrupt Influence too commonly abuses; sometimes it enlarges it to that degree, as to give Admittance to the most flagrant Wickedness: I instance in Oppression; Can any thing be more wicked, more directly opposite to *Humanity* than oppressing our Fellow-Creatures? Yet wicked and *inhuman* as this is, it is no new thing for the Powerful to find out Reasons to reconcile even very gross Instances of it to themselves; it is well if Superiority itself is not sometimes thought a Reason; as bad a one as it is, it very often is the best. Power is construd into Right; and because it cannot with exact Certainty be determin'd where what is strictly just ends, and what is oppressive begins, hardly any Usage is allow'd to be so bad as to deserve the Name of Oppression. What I mean by this, is only to shew that *Reason*, tho' the highest and most important Faculty of ou Minds, in frequent Instances being thus mad the Tool of a corrupt Partiality, on this ac count needs some Support against that selfi Principle, which thus misleads and perv

Now can there be a better, has the Wit of Man, has either *Religion* or *Philosophy* suggested any better than the Christian Precept before us supplies us with? To substitute our selves in the Place and Circumstances of every Man with whom we have to do; or others in our Place and Circumstances; and then to observe in what Light Things present themselves to *us*; what appears to *us* to be the fair and equal Thing, when by the Advantage of such a Change of Situation, the Case becomes as it were our own. More particularly to put the Question home to our selves. Is this or that a degree of Favour, which others, were they in my Circumstances, might fairly challenge at my Hands? Or on the other Hand, in Matters of Right, to place our selves in their Circumstances, and to ask; Were this that I am now about doing to them, to be done to me, should I like it, should I be pleased and contented with it? For thus the same selfish Principle, which before corrupted our Judgments, and inclin'd them too much one way, by applying the *Rule* in this manner, turns them as much the other. If before Weight was cast into one Scale, as much

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is now thrown into the other. And by this Means we are brought at last to weigh Things in an equal Balance, to judge impartially, even in Things that most nearly concern us. For Instance; If before, we were tempted to trespass upon others for our Convenience: Making the Case our own, we abhor such Partiality; we can't bear that others should make a Convenience of us.

More particularly, if we are for making too free with Truth, in Instances which have an injurious Tendency, and hurt the Properties of other Men, we are far from thinking this allowable, when our own will suffer by it. Then Truth is sacred, it is not to be made the Tool of private Interest, and every the least Departure from it, when it is at the Expence of our own Rights, is severely censur'd and condemn'd. So again, when it falls to our Share to have any Part in determining the Properties of *others*; if we are for bearing too hard upon them, for straining a Point to their Prejudice; it is but turning the Edge of our Decisions against our own Interests, and supposing our selves the Parties aggriev'd by such Practice; and

and we quickly not only *see*, but even *feel* the *Iniquity* of it. We then are nicely sensible of every little Approach towards such Unfairness. However the Boundaries of *Right* might seem enlarg'd before, we now find them contracted within a much narrower Compass. They no longer admit of the same Latitude; the very same Line, which, 'twas judg'd excusable, perhaps justifiable to pass before, is now not to be exceeded a Hairs-breadth. All beyond is manifest Partiality, downright Injury and Injustice.

Thus much to clear the Difficulties which attend the *Rule*, and to shew the Usefulness of it.

I come now to lay before you some Motives to the Practice of it; to try if by any Means I can persuade us all, not only in the Instances I have been mentioning, but in all others, whatever our Station be, or whatever the Part we are to act, strictly to bring ourselves to the Test of this *Rule*, never to lose Sight of it, but upon all Occasions to give constant and undeniable Proofs of the same just, the same human and equitable

Regard to others, which we ourselves desire to meet with at their Hands. This we must all own ourselves indispensibly oblig'd to by the Principles of our common Nature; for we cannot deny but that *that* is still the same, notwithstanding any Shufflings of outward Condition, any accidental Differences of Fortune, which give occasion indeed to a diversifying of the Parts which different Men are oblig'd to act on this earthly Stage, and this too (let me add) for the Good of the whole, and not of any particular Person, but that is all; still human Nature is essentially the same in every one of us, from the greatest Prince to the meanest Peasant; and hence therefore it necessarily follows, that there can be no essential difference in their Cases, but that what is right for one under the same Circumstances, is equally and for ever right for another. It is on this Equality of Men by *Nature*, and because (as the judicious *Hooker* expresses it) "those things which are "equal must needs all have one Measure," that the rational Part of Mankind have founded the great Maxims of *Justice*, and of all those Duties which we owe one to another; and the Foundation which is thus laid,

laid, will stand while Reason and human Nature continue the same.

But if the Principles of our common Nature oblige us to be *just*, *equal*, and *impartial* to all Men, I am sure those of the *Religion* we profess enforce this still further upon us.

For, in the Name of God, with what Face can that Man pretend to be a Christian who has not common Honesty? *Let every one that nameth the Name of Christ depart from Iniquity*; let him at least, of all Men in the World, avoid all gross and scandalous Dishonesty; and as he professes to believe that God has appointed a Day wherein he will judge the World in *Righteousness*; let him shew his Regard to the great *Rule* of *Righteousness*; let him do nothing to others which he would not think himself fairly dealt with if they did the *same* to him. Without this, we may call ourselves Christians, or what else we please; but in reality, a mere Heathen, whose Morals are good, and who living up to the Light, be it less or more, which *God* has given him, makes a Conscience of doing Wrong, is a much better

Man; and how much soever we may undervalue him in respect of ourselves as no Christian, which is nothing else but a Piece of Vanity and Narrowness, which attends all Parties; for in such a Case it may, I think, more properly be said of us that we are of a Party, than that indeed we embrace the *Christian Religion:* I say, how much soever we may undervalue such a one as no *Christian*, he is as much more so, as real Facts are before empty Words; as to practise Religion is more properly the Part of a Christian, than merely to make Profession of it.

Most certainly there is nothing gives so true a Worth to any Person as the Character of a strict Integrity and thorough Honesty; to say of him, that he is one who duly and conscientiously makes every Man's Case his own; that he is superior to all Temptations, and that the whole World cannot biass and corrupt him; wherever we meet with such a one, we praise and speak well of him. Even in *China* or *Turky* his Reputation is the same; Men still have the same Value for an honest Man.

Nay, I appeal to all who hear me, if this does not command a Respect, where there

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is nothing else, no other Accomplishment whatever to recommend Men; Accomplishment did I say, where there is nothing but what excites Pity; for it makes a poor *Indian*, even tho' he be the lowest and meanest of his Species, both to be lov'd and valu'd by us. On the contrary, without this great moral Virtue, at least in some degree, no one in any Part of the World is ever esteem'd a truly worthy Man. Let his other Qualifications be what they will, if he is void of common *Honesty*; if in his general Character he is *partial*, *unrighteous*, and *oppressive*, he is sure to be pursu'd, sometimes with the Contempt, but always with the Hatred and Detestation of all that know him.

If therefore the *Common Sense* of *Mankind* carries any thing of Weight and Authority along with it:——If there is any Regard due to the universal Verdict of Human Nature; let us cautiously avoid doing any Thing whereby we may justly forfeit the Character of honest Men. Let us consider, when at any time we are tempted to injure others, either in the way of Violence, by Acts of Power of any Kind, (I mean such as have Power only, and not Right to justify

justify them;) or by *Fraud*, by any mean Artifice whatever to over-reach, to trick them out of their Properties, even though we cover our Iniquity with the Name and Appearance of Law; for certainly Injustice is not extenuated by this Circumstance, that it comes from a Quarter which ought to protect Men from it; that it turns the Means of our Defence and Security into an Instrument of Oppression; when, I say, we are tempted in this manner to *Injure* others, to take Advantages of them in *Judgment*, in Confidence of our Interest, our Wealth, our greater Knowledge and Experience; or, in short, of the Opportunities of any kind, which we have above them: I say, in all these Cases, let us consider how much we condemn such *Injustice*, when we suffer by it our selves; how little Gainers we are by it in the whole; since whatever low Interests we may serve, whatever mean Passions we may gratify by it, (for mean and low they certainly are) in our coolest Moments we constantly judge them so; yet it is sure to deprive us of what is truly valuable, that real Merit which gives us a Value, both with ourselves, and with all the World.

Happy,

Happy, particularly happy are those, who having wisely chose the contrary and better Part, make it their great Endeavour, to the utmost their Situation allows, to do *Justice* to all Men. And in this *Audience*, 'tis natural for me to add, *happiest* of *all* are *they*, who (moving in a higher Sphere, and being the *Principal Ministers* of *Publick Justice*; the shining Lights, the Ornaments of their venerable Profession, the *Law*, that great Bulwark of Property, that only true Source of Liberty; Liberty without which there is nothing can make Life eligible,) employ those excellent Talents which *God*, for that very End, has entrusted them with, in maintaining the Peace and Order of *Society*, securing Men in their just Rights, protecting the Weak and Friendless, rescuing them from the proud Insults, the inhuman, and often cruel Wrongs of their Oppressors; and consequently entitling themselves to the Blessings of the Widow, the Fatherless, or those who through any unhappy Cirtumstances, are in the like destitute Condition. ——— These, in a peculiar Manner, are the Pleasures of Humanity. We cannot be insensible of them, without

deny-

his Lord's Will, and prepar'd not himself to do accordingly, shall be beaten with many Stripes. It is very probable that his own *unrighteous Dealings* may even in this World (as they often are) be return'd on his own Head. So he cannot but know, nay so, very frequently his guilty *Conscience* alarms him to fear that the *Providence* of *God* may order it; but tho' he escapes the Hands of Men, he will be sure not to escape those of the *living God.*

Now to that *God*, even the *one infinite* and *eternal Being*, who is *Sovereign* over *all*; in whose *Presence* we continually are; and to whose *Justice* we all feel ourselves *alike accountable*; who is the great *Avenger* of all *Unrighteousness* and *Oppression*; and finally, our *only sure Refuge* both in *Life* and *Death*: To *Him*, and to *Him only*, be all possible *Reverence*, *Adoration* and *Obedience*, now and for ever. *Amen.*

F I N I S.